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2001 *The Arctic Voyages of Martin Frobisher: An Elizabethan Adventure,* Montreal and Kingston, Canadian Museum of Civilization and McGill-Queen's University Press, 200 pages.

In a magisterial essay reviewing historical publications of the past decade which deal with North American Discovery and Exploration, Codignola (2002:188-191) has drawn attention to recent wide-ranging contributions relating to the three arctic voyages of the English navigator Martin Frobisher in 1576, 1577 and 1578. These scholarly endeavours cover such varied fields as biography, archaeology, native ethnohistory, geography, geology, history, as well as 16th century medical knowledge, mineralogy, naval architecture, navigational techniques, and ore assaying. Readers interested in biographical details will be drawn to two outstanding publications. McDermott (2001) provides an overall account of Frobisher's life and accomplishments in the context of Elizabethan society. The focus of Robert McGhee's study is more on examining the political and economic background of Frobisher's northern ventures, on the reconstruction of archaeological remains associated with these projects, on drawing parallels between fraudulent mining schemes then and now, and on analyzing the cultural preconceptions of English-Inuit contact. It combines sound scholarship with literary skill, an enviable talent which has gained him consistent acclaim throughout his lengthy career as curator of arctic archaeology at the Canadian Museum of Civilization.

McGhee's slim volume (book jacket printed in Singapore!) is subdivided into a preamble, 15 medium-length chapters, a section on *Sources and Selected Readings* (but no reference citations), and an index. In it he distils insights gained during a decade of personal involvement with a multi-disciplinary Frobisher research program to which British, Canadian and American specialists contributed, encompassing historiographical and technical studies, the archaeological investigation of 16th century European and Inuit sites in the Baffin Island region, and the mounting of museum exhibits.

For a number of reasons, 16th century England lagged behind its European neighbours in opening up trade routes to other parts of the world and establishing commercial outposts there. Gold, silver, precious stones, silk cloth and spices were the main attractions. Fretting at this situation, a group of London merchants established the Muscovy Company which aimed to find an arctic passage way to Cathay (Asia). When northeast attempts proved impracticable, attention became centered on a northwest direction. One of the proponents was Martin Frobisher, an experienced mariner with abundant leadership qualities who earlier on in his career had engaged in privateering (including slaving) activities. Although not familiar with the arctic region itself, he was determined to explore its possibilities. To obtain financial backing, he approached contacts at the Royal Court, including the Queen herself. Other resource persons were drawn into the scheme, notably Michael Lok, a merchant adventurer who promoted the expeditions among his business associates as well as investing heavily in them himself, and John Dee, an academic adept in the use of navigational instruments.

In succeeding chapters, drawing on the surviving records of the Frobisher voyages such as logs and journals, as well as on his own experiences in the Arctic, McGhee details the dietary monotony and the miseries of confined life on small ships, and depicts the constant struggle with northern elements: shifting gales, storms raging for days on end, floating ice, tidal currents, dangerous approaches to land and inadequate shelter against cold and rain while on shore. The exploratory voyage of 1576 to Frobisher Bay on Baffin Island did not achieve much. No clear indication as to the existence of a Northwest Passage was obtained. Although Frobisher persisted in promoting the idea, attention now turned to a chunk of glittering black rock, brought back as a symbolic token of land possession, which was tested by an assayer of shady reputation and falsely declared to contain gold. This news served as an incentive for enticing stockholders to invest in two additional voyages with the aim of mining precious metals. The English Crown, moreover, viewed it as an opportunity to lay claim to Canada's northern regions by establishing a colony there. The 1577 voyage, in its turn, did not produce any conclusive results. The rock samples were tested by several assayers who expressed contradictory opinions about their content. Despite growing doubts, however, human greed won out over common sense (McGhee draws some interesting parallels with the notorious Bre-X mining case more than a decade ago). Yet another fleet was sent out in 1578, which returned with over 1000 tons of igneous and metamorphic rock extracted by enormous effort under extremely primitive conditions (the archaeological traces of these activities on Kodlunarn Island are described at some length by McGhee). This time the gold bubble burst, smelter trials showed negative, and realization finally set in that the ores were indeed worthless. It is not altogether clear why various assayers initially produced fraudulent reports. Apart from possible bribes, and some assurance of long term employment, they themselves did not stand to reap much personal gain. Physical intimidation by Frobisher may have played a role. Powerfully built—able to reach down and lift an Inuk with kayak on shipboard—he possessed a violent temper. There was a thuggish side to the man (his portrait depicts him strutting with a pistol in one hand), and reports had him threatening subordinates with drawn dagger or sword.

An informed public (including his peers) will derive considerable enjoyment from McGhee's recounting of this arctic epic. Only minor mistakes escaped the meticulous editing process (*e.g.*, "horde" for "hoard" on p.150). Some of the colour cartography is ineffective and the archaeological features on the Kodlunarn map merit more precise indication. McGhee offers some astute observations on the nature of early English-Inuit encounters in the Arctic. Initial contact with the Inuit in 1576 led to some desultory barter. Unfortunately, five seamen who rowed to a nearby native encampment were never seen again. As a bargaining ploy, Frobisher kidnapped an Inuk hunter who was brought back to England where he deceased soon after. These ominous episodes did not bode well for later relationships. Upon his return to Baffin Island in 1577, Frobisher kidnapped an additional number of Natives (man, woman and child) and engaged in skirmishes during which several others were killed. These captives were also carried back to England where, from lack of immunity, they eventually died of communicable diseases. One wishes that McGhee could have extended his reflections on European-Native contact to other regions in Eastern Canada such as Southern Labrador, the Strait of Belle-Isle and the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland where, over the course of more than two centuries until well into the 18th century, Inuit and European fishermen (Basque, French, English, etc.) maintained a wary and unstable relationship: engaging in varying episodes of brawling, killing, plundering, silent barter or in some instances, more open commercial practices which allowed for the development of pidgin trade languages.

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